

Published: April 21, 2014, Kokomo Tribune [Page: A1, jump to A3]

http://www.kokomotribune.com/news/local_news/article_65f319d1-4638-5f5b-b9ea-777a7ef84858.html



KT photo | **Tim Bath**

HISTORY: Buddy Wysong video tapes the May 18, 2004 demolition of the Kokomo Skating Arena by Banner Excavating. He is the uncle of Kim Hinkle, the granddaughter of Byrl Hinkle, the owner.



KT photo | **Tim Bath**

FINAL: John Banner II, with Banner Excavating, does a final walk-through to make sure water and power are off and no one is in the building before Kokomo Skating arena is taken down May 18, 2004.



KT photo | **Shawn Knapp**

MESS: Debris from the Kokomo Skating Arena and nearby businesses line East Morgan Street after a tornado touched down April 20, 2004.



KT photo | **Tim Bath**

DEBRIS: Charlie Scott, who managed the Kokomo Skating Arena for 27 years, walks past the roof damage April 21, 2004. The business lost its roof when a tornado came through the night before. He was helping clear things out that could be saved before the rain came.



KT photo | **Tim Bath**

DESTROYED: Gina Scott takes a cart full of candy and other items out of the Kokomo Skate Arena on April 21, 2004. She was helping clear out anything that was salvageable from the business that lost its roof when a tornado came through the night before.



KT photo | **Tim Bath**

TORNADO: Margaret Layne, sister of the owner of the Kokomo Skating Arena, walks past the roof damage April 21, 2004. The business lost its roof when a tornado came through the night before. She was helping assess the damage and lining up workers to help clean up the mess.

Kokomo Skating Arena: 10 years gone

Tornado destroyed landmark April 20, 2004

By Rob Burgess

Tribune night editor

If you drive past the intersection of East Morgan and North Ohio streets these days you'll see some trees, a parking lot and a Dollar General store. What you won't see is the Kokomo Skating Arena, a landmark which stood on this corner for decades until a tornado caved the roof in April 20, 2004. Those who knew it well said they won't soon forget it.

"The rink is as much a part of my family as our last name," said Dustin Riddle, who grew up next door to longtime owners Byrl and Daniel "Red" Hinkle. (The latter died in 1994.) "I would walk with my [teenage] cousins, who at that time were regulars [at the rink.] ... It was kind of a family event."

Fellow arena veterans, including Brandy Riggs, said they spent countless hours there. As a child, Riggs lived four houses down from the arena, and even met her future husband there.

"Every chance, every time the doors were open, I was at the skating rink," she said. "I know if I was in trouble or something like that, my parents knew ... the one thing that would work was saying, 'You can't go skating.' And

that was like you were taking away my best friend. ... That was what we wanted to do every single weekend.”

Many lifelong friendships were made on that floor. Riggs’ brother-in-law, Jessy Nice, is one of the co-founders of the internationally-known, Greentown-based “professional aggressive jam skating” group, Breaksk8.

“We grew up there pretty much,” he said. “That’s where we all kind of found each other.”

Besides providing the seed for many long-term relationships, the arena also served as a place of employment. Riddle said Byrl Hinkle “hated nothing more than a flaccid dollar bill,” which led to his first job: ironing cash.

“[Byrl] was kind of a cynical old lady,” he said. “She didn’t trust the banks, but she kept a lot of her cash there on hand down in her basement. And we’d go down there and sit and iron \$20s and \$50s and singles for hours on end for a couple of bucks. ... For whatever reason, though, she always ironed [the money], starch and all.”

By all accounts, Byrl Hinkle ran a tight ship. Nice said Byrl kicked his fledgling group out of the rink on a fairly regular basis as he and his friends transitioned from speed skating to more daring moves.

“We started venturing into the middle and trying to do these tricks, which was kind of like breakdancing on skates,” he said. “We started doing flips and jumping over the walls. ... They ended up accepting it after a while. They understood that we weren’t out to hurt anybody.”

Everything changed 10 years ago this week. Riddle said he was working in the DJ booth at the rink the night of the storms.

“It started getting pretty bad raining and storming,” he said. “It got real peaceful for a minute. It was bright and sunny and the birds were chirping, and the next thing you know, all hell broke loose.”

It was then the funnel cloud touched down just a few blocks away. By that time, the packed house of skaters had been instructed to move from the middle of the arena to alongside the walls. Riddle said he had his skates on and his head tucked between his legs when the black, swirling cloud hit.

“[It sounded like] a freight train,” he said. “And then the next thing you know the windows blew in. You could hear the water backing up. ... The roof collapsed from the middle where everybody [had been] standing. I looked over my shoulder and watched the roof cave in.”

After the storm passed, nothing would be the same again. Riddle said Byrl Hinkle expressed her intentions to rebuild, but complications including her failing health, family issues and building codes put that idea to rest. The rink was entirely demolished the following month. Byrl died that July.

For three years after, Kokomo no longer had a skating rink. That changed in 2007 when Dan Dumoulin II opened Kokomo Skate World & Fun Center. Riggs, Nice and Riddle all agreed it just wasn't the same, though.

"[With the Kokomo Skating Arena,] your parents could drop you off and not worry about you, kind of like a babysitter," said Riggs. "The new Kokomo rink, I couldn't take my kids there and just drop them off and let them stay."

Nice and his wife managed Kokomo Skate World & Fun Center for eight months last year. He said they had an option to buy it, but the asking price was too high.

"People just weren't doing the right things," he said. "They had a bad crowd."

Kokomo Skate World & Fun Center closed late last year. And now, Kokomo is again without a skating rink. Riddle said he can't help but feel Kokomo's youth are lacking an experience.

“I’ve got a younger brother that would have been just the right age to start going skating,” he said. “I see all these kids now who are always running around. I see them on their roller skates, actually. It makes me wonder: Are those your older brother or sisters’ that passed them down and you get to use them now? I certainly feel like there’s a certain amount of nostalgia that the younger generations missed out.”

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